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THE PLACE(S) OF MOLDOVANKA IN THE MAKING OF ODESSA

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On a late fall day in 2002, Alexandra, a lawyer in her late forties of mixed German, Polish and Russian ancestry, was showing me the courtyard where she used to live in Moldovanka, a district in Ukraine's southern port city of Odessa. One building was crumbling. All the residents had moved away except two elderly women still waiting for the city authorities to provide them with a new flat. Most residents of the adjacent building (constructed in 1861) where Alexandra had grown up had also moved out.¹ She reminisced about her Russian, Ukrainian, German, Jewish and Tatar neighbours and the positive and negative sides of courtyard life. Alexandra had taken on cases of Moldovankan clients whose roof caved in to defend their rights to replacement housing. She commented: "Many of the buildings in the district should be torn down since they can't be restored anyway. There are some plans, however, to make a kind of park (zapovednik). After all, without Moldovanka, there would be no Odessan legend."

The notion of Odessa as a distinct place – captured with the phrase "Odessan legend" – prevails today despite radical political, economic and demographic ruptures in the 20th century that transformed Odessa from the third most prominent city in the Russian Empire and a key node in Black Sea trade routes, to a more marginal Soviet and now Ukrainian sea port.² The city is considered "international," "multi-ethnic," "tolerant" and often "Russian" and/or "Jewish" but "not Ukrainian" by many residents and non-residents alike. Odessa's unique language and forms of sociality are often referred to as its *kolorit*, which can be glossed as colour, vibrancy, exuberance, or exotic quality. Many Odessans attribute the degradation and disappearance of the *kolorit* of Odessa to being "cut off" from Russia as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukrainization policies,³ an imbalance between the outflow of intellectuals and inflow of people from villages and small towns, and the emigration of Jews.

Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Odessa during 2001/2002 and July 2005, this article explores the production and reproduction of Odessa's distinctiveness through the making of the district Moldovanka as place. I treat place as a process (Harvey 1993: 21), a historical production constituted by the interplay of the material, perceived and imagined (Lefebvre 1991), and "articulated moments in networks of social

relations" (Massey 1994: 155). Three elements are interwoven in the concept of place: locale, the settings in which social relations are constituted; location, the effects upon locales of social and economic processes operating at wider scales; and sense of place, the local structure of feeling (Agnew 1993: 263). Although Moldovanka occupies an ambiguous place in the Odessan imaginary, I argue that its symbolic centrality can be attributed to its construction in, or relation to, high culture – most notably in Isaak Babel's *Odessa Stories*. Moldovanka is increasingly being codified as a district in which it is possible to sense the "real Odessa" and witness its *kolorit* in places such as courtyards and the Starokonnoi Market. I suggest that the qualities idealized nowadays about such places – solidarity, kinship-like ties, tolerance of ethnic diversity, amicable conversational exchanges – are partly a response to newly emerging inequalities and cleavages, demographic changes as a result of out- and in-migration. The *kolorit* associated with the images and places in Moldovanka's is shared and regenerated through the spatial practices of touring which mobilize historical and fictional events associated the district's urban landscape. The production of Moldovanka becomes a prism for understanding not only how Odessans articulate their distinctiveness vis a vis Ukraine and the world outside, but also how the interplay of local and translocal historical processes (economic, social, literary) sediment in key images and practices of place.

History in Place

Moldovanka developed as a suburb beyond the 1824 boundary of Odessa's free port boundary (Herlihy 1986: 273). Although some historians claim Moldovanka predates Odessa by about 30 years, others argue that it was settled after Odessa was founded. The former suggest that Moldovans who worked for the Ottomans in building the fortress Yeni Dunia (New World) settled in the area in the late 1760s while the latter argue that a contingent of Moldovans, Greeks and Albanians fleeing the Ottomans settled there between 1797 and 1802. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the territory that became Moldovanka consisted of two settlements: the Bulgarian settlement Bulgarka, later called Bugaevka; and Novaia Slobodka where Moldovans were given relatively small plots on

which they built village-style houses and cultivated vineyards and gardens. Mikhailovskaia Square was the centre of the Moldovan settlement and the site of the first Orthodox church (1820) outside the centre of the city as well as of a cemetery. Located nearby were military barracks and country houses of the city's wealthy residents, including the dacha of Richelieu. In the first third of the 19th century Moldovanka emerged as the dominant settlement.

Architects who designed buildings in Odessa's central district (such as Boffo, Torichelli, and Dalakva) also played a role in planning Moldovanka. If the 1835 general plan is compared with a contemporary map, it is evident that the grid-like network of Moldovankan streets, squares and lanes has remained largely unchanged (Dontsova 2001: 74). Once Moldovanka was included in the general city plan, it had to have "approved facades" which were the responsibility of the city architects. Although the blueprints for the homes of ordinary residents were neither complex nor highly varied, a "comfortable district with character was constructed" (ibid: 80). Churches, civic institutions and more cumbersome multi-flat buildings that appeared later on, blended in with the existing single story dwellings without diminishing their value (ibid: 80). Thus, after 1835 the suburb gradually transformed from a conglomerate of village-like settlements that included a few large plots held by richer landowners to a suburb more urban in form.

As the 19th century progressed, the population became more multi-ethnic. Although Bulgarskaia Street was originally settled by Bulgarians in the 1830s, by the end of the century the street's residents comprised Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, Germans, Greeks, and Roma. There were many churches – including a catholic cathedral – of architectural interest in Moldovanka, most of which were blown up in the 1930s. By the end of the nineteenth century, Jews made up a significant part of the district's population as can be seen by the presence of eleven prayer houses and the relocation of the Jewish Hospital (founded in 1801) to the district in the 1820s during a cholera epidemic. Moldovanka, despite its concentration of Jews, "was in no sense a ghetto – a district where Jews were legally obligated or willingly chose to reside" (Herlihy 1986: 274; see also Klier 2002).

By the end of the century, Moldovanka had transformed from a mixed district of dachas and villagers to a poor neighbourhood with a

reputation for criminality where new migrants flocked (Herlihy 1986; Sylvester 1996, 2001). Although some factories were built in the district prior to the October revolution many more were built afterwards. However, although Moldovanka was a suburb at the edge of Odessa even as late as the 1930s, nowadays, given that Odessa has expanded considerably to the north and south, spatially it is a relatively central district.

Moldovanka at the Margin and the Centre

Isaak Babel's image of Moldovanka as a poor, crime-ridden district with larger-than-life characters often stands for all of Odessa – it is the symbolic centre of the Odessan Myth (Cukierman 1980). The Odessan Myth refers to the history and development of a constellation of images and ideas about the distinctiveness of Odessa among cities of the Russian Empire primarily, though not exclusively, in Russian-language texts (Naidorf 2001: 329).⁴ Although symbolically central to the myth, the district has been geographically, socially, and economically marginal in relation to the centre of the city (Sylvester 1996, 2001), much like the *faubourgs* in nineteenth-century French cities (Merriman 1991). Dontsova's book about Moldovanka argues for the district's symbolic centrality in the city on the basis of the existence of important cultural institutions and architectural monuments. The polarities of centre and margin surface often in comments about Moldovanka, as with Alexandra, some of whom stress the mythical and some the mundane.

A consideration of the complicated and inseparable relationships between "high" and "low" culture, centre and periphery, the physical body and geographical space opens up possibilities for interpreting the relationship images of Moldovanka to its perceived status as socially and economically marginal (Stallybrass and White 1986: 2). Marginality is a relational condition whose meaning shifts when viewed by individuals from inside and outside the margins (Day, et al. 1999). The social definition of marginal places and spaces is often closely related to the categorization of objects, practices, ideas and social relationships as belonging to "low culture" (Shields 1991: 5). The politics of the process of symbolic exclusion depends on "positional superiority... which puts the High in a whole series of possible relationships with the Low without ever losing the upper hand" (in Stallybrass and White 1986: 5). This allows a series of ambivalent representations and relationships to the "low" or the "marginal" and an interlocking interdependency of the "high" on the

“low” as a result of which “the low-Other is despised and denied at the level of political organization and social being whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture” (Stallybrass and White 1986: 5).

Thinking in terms of the inter-relationships between “high” and “low,” centre and periphery illuminates not only the relationship between the contradictory images of Moldovanka, but also the conditions in which these images are produced – namely, the historical moment of their production and the position of the writer producing them. I use the notions of high and low culture to examine the social marginalization of the district through the portrayal of the practices of Moldovankan residents as “low” in relation to residents’ behaviour of the city centre. At the same time I explore the role of a high literary representation in the creation of the idea that district and its characters are the symbolic centre of the Odessan Myth. In the sketches of place-images below, I describe how the district alternately shifts from margin to centre in the city along three different axes – geographic, socio-economic and symbolic – in relation to its manifestation as low or high culture.

A Distinct Place

You think that there’s only one Odessa? No. There are several Odessas. It’s something like a federation. The centre is one Odessa. Moldovanka is a second. Peresyp is a third. Slobodka, a fourth. There’s still Bugaevka, Blizhnie Melnitsy – but these are small autonomous oblasts.

Moldovanka is the direct opposite of the centre. Here poverty abounds. During the years of the years of the reaction people fled – and where to? ... New York. People from Moldovanka would not settle for anything less.

To describe Moldovanka is to repeat Babel. You’ll end up describing the same thing just a great deal worse. In any case, this is an extraordinarily “koloritnyi” part of the territory of the Odessan federation.

– Leonid Utesov

Whereas Utesov used the language of the Soviet state – federation, republic, oblast – to describe Moldovanka as a spatially and socially distinct area of the pre-revolutionary Odessa of his childhood, in press accounts prior to the outbreak

of World War I Moldovanka was described as a “city of thieves” or “a city within a city” (Sylvester 2001). Sylvester has argued that the district was constructed in opposition to the centre as part of the process of the consolidation of a bourgeois identity in Odessa.

The notion that Moldovanka is a spatially and socially distinct area persisted despite the introduction of Soviet policies aimed at leveling such differences. When Alexandra’s mother was offered a flat in the centre she decided instead to remain in Moldovanka. “What would we do there with our simple faces?” she said. Throughout the 1960s and 70s Stepovaia Street in Moldovanka served as a second Deribasovskaia Street where residents would promenade. Although Odessans from all over the city would stroll on Deribasovskaia, only residents of Moldovanka went to Stepovaia Street. Several people who resided in and outside of the district noted that it had its own fashion style and behavioural norms in public places. Tatiana Dontsova recalled that behaviour in movie theatres in Moldovanka differed from that on the other side of Staroportofrankovskaia Street. Audiences were boisterous, as adults would often bring wine to the theatre. Sometimes a small band would play before the movie, while during the film people often entered the theatre and called out the names of individuals they sought. Thus fashion, norms, behaviour and courtyard customs contributed to the perception of Moldovanka as a distinct place even in the late Soviet period.

Isaak Babel and Moldovanka

Individuals of all ages suggested I read Babel’s stories “to understand Odessa.” The brief for a conference organized by the Migdal Community Centre for the 110th anniversary of Babel’s birth states with typical Odessan hyperbole that “Odessa made Babel” and continues: “it can also be said that Babel made Odessa.”⁵ When Babel’s story as a writer and his *Odessa Stories* are considered in terms of the relationship between “high” and “low” culture and their spatial and symbolic referents, the centrality of his images in the Odessan Myth can be better understood.

Babel’s writing needs to be placed in the context of pre-revolutionary Russian-Jewish writing and Soviet Russian writing after the revolution (Markish 1987: 175). He has been considered “the first Jewish writer to write from within Russian literature and to give the Jewish milieu colour and depth” (Sicher 1995: 72). Prior

to Babel, "even if a Russian-Jewish writer succeeded in attracting the attention of the Russian reading public... he still remained outside the bounds of Russian literature proper, perceived as an alien or exotic phenomenon" (Markish 1987: 173). Further, although Babel's attraction to marginal figures such as criminals as subjects for his works may have been part of a broader Soviet literary interest in the criminal underworld and trickster-like figures such as con-men (Falen 1974; Markish 1987), he may have partly identified with them as marginal people (Rubin 2000). The figure of criminal provided a way for Jewish writers to question certain social hierarchies and at the same time served as a kind of model of their own activity: "Active 'knee-breaking' or 'black-marketeering' their way into an exclusive literary canon, they are outcasts and rebels who still 'do business' with the system – and indeed they need to, and must demand their right to do so" (Rubin 2000: 8). Babel's status as a writer both reflects and complicates Stallybrass and White's framework. On the one hand he was a writer who contributed to the production of "high culture" who appropriated "low culture" through his representation of Jewish bandits in Moldovanka. On the other hand, as a Jew, he was himself marginal at first in Russian cultural circles. His depiction of Jewish criminals in high cultural form catapulted him to fame and allowed him to enter into high literary circles. At the same time he created images of Moldovanka that became central in the representation of Odessa.

Babel is best-known for his *Odessa Stories* and *Red Cavalry*. The four core works of *Odessa Stories* – *The King*, *How It Was Done In Odessa*, *The Father*, and *Liubka Cossack* – were published between 1921 and 1923 and are interrelated through the cast of characters, themes, milieu and narrative tone (Falen 1974: 62). Other stories set in Odessa featuring the same characters include *Justice in Brackets* (1921), *The End of the Almshouse*, *Sunset*, and *Froim Grach* (1934). The stories depict the Jewish criminal underworld in Moldovanka in the period following the 1905 Revolution and end in the later stories with the confrontation between the bandits and the Soviet police. *The King* introduces Benia Krik (Benia the Yell), the ringleader of Moldovanka's gangsters, depicts his marriage to the rich Eichbaum's daughter, and describes how his men forestalled a police raid during the wedding of Benia's sister by setting fire to the police station. *How It Was Done In Odessa* recounts how Benia became "The King" through his handling of a robbery of the wealthy

Jewish merchant Tartakovskii and the accidental killing of Tartakovskii's clerk. *The Father* recounts Benia's marriage to Basia, the rotund daughter of the red-headed, one-eyed gangster Froim Grach and the uniting of two bandit families. The fourth story *Liubka Cossack* depicts the formidable madam Liubka Schneeweiss nicknamed "The Cossack" for her size, strength and ability to run an inn. Although Falen has characterized these tales as "primarily a phenomenon of style and tone, experiments in narrative composition, and masterpieces in the use of colourful language." Briker has underscored the importance of plot structures (Briker 1994: 117; Falen 1974: 63). In particular, he has demonstrated how the gangster raid served as an organizing structure into which events of Jewish communal life such as a wedding (*The King*) or a funeral (*How It Was Done In Odessa*) were incorporated.

Babel's commentators capture evocatively the features of his prose. Describing his characters Rubin remarked, "Babel's colourful Odessan gangsters loom larger and wilder than life." Commentators use words like "fairyland" and "carnival world" to characterize Babel's depiction of Moldovanka. Soviet dissident writer and literary critic Andrei Sinyavsky commented that "Babel's Odessa is a fairyland where local images and national traits are surrounded by a halo of legend" while Falen noted that "his fictional Moldovanka is the direct antithesis of all that is lifeless or gray; its bizarre people live in a carnival world, in an atmosphere of lurid cooler" (Falen 1974: 75; Sinyavsky 1987: 92). Critics have alternately referred to "Babel's Moldovanka" and "Babel's Odessa" which along with Babel's title *Odessa Stories* illustrates how Moldovanka comes to stand for the whole of Odessa. Further, in describing Babel's language Falen has written: "Through ornamental style he forces his reader to view the commonplace through a topsy-turvy kaleidoscope, or to use one of his own images, through a pair of magic spectacles" (Falen 1974: 73). Finally, Konstantin Paustovsky, Babel's contemporary, described the foreign nature of this world for the cultural elite reading his stories: "*The King* dealt with a world completely outside our experience. The characters, their motives, their circumstances and their vivid, forceful talk – all were strange to us. The story had the vitality of a grotesque" (Paustovsky 1987: 113). These critics' comments illustrate how Babel transformed the "low cultural ways" of Moldovanka into something alluring and exotic for the Soviet literary elite.

For all the magic of his prose, Babel did not invent the world of his stories from scratch but likely used stories from local newspaper accounts and urban folklore (Briker 1994). Newspaper articles from the time reveal not only the common practice of raids and their increased frequency after the revolution, but also how the texts of the extortionist letters in Babel's stories are identical to those common at that time. *Blatnyie pesni* (underground songs) from the early 20th century contain descriptions of milieux, scenarios and heroes – or “kings” as lead gangsters were commonly called – similar to those Babel used (Briker 1994: 124). Benia Krik is modeled on the legendary real-life gangster Misha Iaponchik (Misha the Japanese whose real name was Moiseev /innitskii) – also called “The King.” Misha Iaponchik allied himself with the Bolsheviks during the Civil War for whom he organized a regiment of bandits to fight, but in the end the Bolsheviks killed him (Briker 1994: 130). Finally, in rendering Odessan speech – a mix of Russian, Ukrainian and Yiddish – Babel made judicious use of distorted syntax and morphology or other slight deviations from the norms of standard speech (Falen 1974).

If Babel drew inspiration from the peculiarities of urban life in Moldovanka, his own stories, characters and turns of phrase continue to surface in social life. Katerina Greenberg and her husband Igor Kogan, a lecturer at the Polytechnical University nicknamed their cat “Cat-and-a-half” after the character Tartakovskii whose nickname was “Jew-and-a-half” when she gave birth to a single kitten. Igor also described how a group of students at his school in central Odessa would meet after class to read Babel's stories in the early 1960s. At my friend Natalia's weekly beer night at her home, her guest, Roman, once played a series of songs about Babel's Moldovankan characters on the guitar. While visiting Katerina and Igor's dacha, their guest, Grisha, an engineer who works for a small firm, referred offhandedly to how he had brought his book of Babel's stories to work that day to settle a friendly dispute with his boss about whether in a certain story Babel had written “eat and drink” or “drink and eat.” Finally, on two occasions, Viktor Feldman (b. 1915), an archivist who grew up in a Moldovankan courtyard (see below), repeated lines from Babel's stories without citing him. On one occasion, to illustrate his grandmother's misfortune in being married off to a man that owned an inn where *bindiuzhniki* (draymen) stayed, he said: “What does a drayman think

about? About drinking ... and punching someone in the face” – a quote from *How It Was Done In Odessa*. These examples illustrate how Babel's high cultural distillations of quirky characters and customs from the social margins of Moldovanka continue to take on different social meanings in everyday life in Odessa where at times the boundary between fiction and reality appears to blur.

More Odessan than Odessa Itself

In contrast to other tourist guides from the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the first volume of a new journal for tourists about Odessa devotes a section to Moldovanka (Gubar et al 2002). The text constructs an atemporal image of Moldovanka partly through folklore, partly through cultural and commercial institutions once found there. It is accompanied by pictures of quaint, run-down Moldovankan courtyards, and folkloric figures represented in the courtyard of the Odessa Literature Museum. The text begins with an account of a famous criminal and his wedding banquet in Moldovanka on the corner of Razumovskaia and Kosvenaia Street and describes the “*kolorit*” of neighbours gathered in a courtyard. Although the author refers to monuments such as the Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, the Ravine Synagogue and St. Clementine's Catholic Cathedral, the Institute for Noble Maidens, and the Starokonnoi Market, he devotes more time to describing some of the famous brothels on Zaporozhskaia Street and a story about a certain madam.

After detailing the specialized food items produced in the district as well as various factories and workshops, Gubar lists famous people connected with the district: Isaak Babel, Aleksander Pushkin (who arrived to the city through the area and described it briefly in Evgenii Onegin), Eduard Bagritskii (who passed through the district when he left the city and described it in one of his poems), and Emil Gilels (the world-famous pianist who was born and lived there). The text describes the communal life of courtyards, their multi-ethnic composition, the ethnic tolerance of their inhabitants and the Odessan language that emerged from there. After listing various professions at the bottom of the social hierarchy, the author dwells on *bindiuzhniki* (the Ukrainian word for draymen which Babel popularized) – a now vanished profession vividly described in Babel's stories – and their worldview, customs and laws. Finally, after describing various wine cellars, musicians and songs in conclusion we read:

Today you hear different music in Moldovanka. There are new supermarkets, firms, Internet providers, garages, ad agencies... But Moldovanka remains in these decorations, in your ears, in life because it is a unique phenomenon of morals, norms, lifestyle, melancholic memories – in short it is more Odessan than Odessa itself. (ibid: 44)

The folkloric figures and marginal types like criminals and madams presented in this text mirror Babel's stories and underscore and perpetuate a particular view of Moldovanka in which its exotic marginality becomes symbolically central.

Dangerous and Down and Out

Although some residents enthusiastically romanticized Moldovanka, others looked down on the place, never went there, and noted the uncomfortable living conditions, the "uncultured" people, and the fact that all institutions of cultural import were in the centre. Elena Malakhovskaia, an artist born in 1937, remarked: "I don't like going there because it is depressing and culturally backward." Leah, a psychology student at the Odessa National University, grew up in the centre but lived in Moldovanka for a few years with her husband who was from the district. She noted: "It is really closely-knit and I was always an outsider. I don't find anything enlightened in the communal courtyard life." Igor Kogan, a lecturer at the Polytechnical University said: "I grew up in the centre of Odessa and all my friends were there. I had no reason and no interest in going to Moldovanka." Further, when I expressed my interest in renting a flat in the district, several people (who lived in the centre) cautioned against it, saying that the district was full of alcoholics and drug addicts and that I might be robbed there.

In contrast, it was not uncommon for people who grew up in Moldovanka to consider the centre of the city more interesting and prestigious. Galina Maksimenko was born in Moldovanka (1937) but left in the 1950s. A masseuse by training, she worked on a Soviet cruise liner for twenty years. As a university student, her boyfriend lived in a central district and when they married, she moved to his flat in a "more prestigious district near French Boulevard and forgot about my Moldovanka." Tatiana Dontsova, author of the book about Moldovanka, studied at an institute located in the centre which she found architecturally more interesting. Only in the early 1990s did she become interested in her own district of Moldovanka. The characterization

of Moldovanka as uncultured and uninteresting situates it at the symbolic margins of Odessa. It can be read as the persistence of a discourse Sylvester (2001) describes as having emerged in pre-revolutionary times in which a peripheral criminal Moldovanka is seen to represent everything the bourgeois centre is not.

"Cultured" Moldovanka

In her book *Moldovanka* (2001), Dontsova aimed to expand Odessans' understanding of the district through a presentation of its pre-revolutionary history. After a period of archival research she found that much to her surprise that Moldovanka was a "genuine terra incognita on what would seem to be the well studied map of the history of Odessa" (Dontsova 2001: 4). She explains why:

I think that there are two reasons for this apparent paradox: the repression of local history as a science... and the works of Isaak Babel.... In reading *Odessa Stories* the public began to perceive Moldovanka as a kind of outdoor theatre ...which continued to play the tragicomedies from the life of its exalted inhabitants.... Understandably Soviet propaganda, which presented this district – called Ilichevsk – as reborn from the poor of this working class area, would pale beside the magic of Babel's prose. The many years of the coexistence of official and mythical Moldovankas can be felt to this day. More than one generation of Odessans, not to mention readers of "Moldovankan exotica" from other cities has grown up with the deep conviction that "it was, is, and will be like that forever." (ibid: 4)

Dontsova does not aim to negate the mythology but rather to present previously unknown facets of the district's history. She pointed out that although many poor people lived in Moldovanka, the district also had schools, cultural institutions and charities. In focusing on cultural institutions and the intelligentsia her account contrasts with the criminal, down-and-out types that figure in Babel's stories, other legends, and the popular imagination. Through her choice of topics, Dontsova's book is an argument for considering Moldovanka part of the historical "centre" on the terms of the "centre" itself – that is, by underscoring the contribution of its residents and institutions to the social, cultural and economic development of the city.

Shifting Place, Ambivalent Attitudes

In the fall of 2002, the architect-planners responsible for Moldovanka stressed that although the district was once geographically marginal and low-prestige, its current relatively central location is beginning to make it more prestigious. When apartment blocks have been constructed or buildings renovated “they do not remain empty for long.” Indeed, a local real estate agency has highlighted the spatial centrality and the fame of the district.⁶

Moldovanka is in some respects the typical district to undergo gentrification. Indeed, local historians and enthusiasts are appalled that more buildings are not being restored and would welcome such processes. Yet planners frequently point out that many of the buildings have major structural damage because they have not undergone any major renovations since they were built – often in the mid 19th century. Further, they explain, since Moldovanka is now part of the city Centro, building new apartment blocks could accommodate more people than reconstructing existing low-rise structures. Restoration would cost the same or more than constructing new ones while most of the buildings in Moldovanka, though charming, “are not of architectural significance.” Moldovanka enthusiasts on the other hand, do not command the resources to buy up and restore the buildings. In the fall of 2002 plans existed to make a museum of Moldovanka and reconstruct a typical courtyard since, as one planner put it, “there are few such courtyards any more.” However, in July 2005, this plan had fallen by the wayside, whereas projects to tear down and reconstruct residential apartments had accelerated.

Curiously, some local historians expressed ambivalence about the district. Albert Malinovskii (see below) attends the Starokonnoi Market regularly to meet people and “feel the aura” but when I asked about preserving the district, he said the buildings should be torn down. Valerii Netrebskii, a guide and local historian also advocated tearing down much of Moldovanka and building “civilized” housing with proper plumbing, roofing, etc., even though he is generally in favor of preserving buildings. His views horrified his interlocutor, a young photographer who insisted that the way of life in Moldovankan courtyards had produced the Odessan character and must be preserved.

Galina Maximenko captured the complexity of the shifting, contradictory images of Moldovanka during a walk through this district:

Where do you get the name Moldovanka? At the edge of Odessa there were settlements of Moldovans, Bulgarians, and Gypsies. Gradually factories were built there. It was a workers’ district. There was little in the way of intelligentsia there. After the Soviet authorities came, then people there began to get an education – and went out into the world. Gradually others moved there and there was a mix with the intelligentsia. Some lived well, others – badly. Nowadays, some wealthy people live in Moldovanka – large buildings are being constructed. But the centre of Moldovanka has remained Moldovanka. I lived there in the summer on Prokhorovskaia Street – the centre of Moldovanka, near Miasoiedovskaia Street... There’s a song *Pro Miasoiedovskuiu, Ulitsia moia. Akh Odessa...* (Miasoiedovskaia, My Street... O Odessa). You can hear through the window what kinds of thugs walk around there. They drink, fight, shriek...

Galina succinctly sketches the large-scale transformations that have occurred over decades. Yet she also evokes the unchanging character of Moldovanka which she sees as connected to Babelsque images of criminals and their boisterous lifestyle.

Defining Places

Marketplaces and communal courtyards in the historic part of the city are cited by residents as places that have produced and represent the distinctiveness of Moldovanka and Odessa. Courtyards and markets are places of an intense sociality – one a place of dwelling, domesticity and familiar faces, the other a public place of fluctuating relationships and commerce. At the same time, the courtyards and the Starokonnoi Market in Moldovanka are increasingly being codified locally as places that have constituted Odessans as special kinds of people and where the “real Odessa” can still be felt. In contrast, in areas outside Moldovanka, many of my interlocutors felt, the character of the city has been muted due to emigration, privatization of flats, and commercialization of the central areas of the city. Below I illuminate the practices of courtyards and the Starokonnoi Market and their objectification in a local ideology in order to reflect on the broader social processes of which this “objectification” may be part.

Courtyards

More than a hundred years ago it was remarked that Odessa had the charms of both the capital and the province. Her streets are like the capital and her courtyards like the province.

– Elena Karakina, *Or Sameakh*, 27.12.2000

Architecturally, courtyards in Moldovanka vary considerably in size and type of building. The “typical” Moldovankan courtyard is comprised of two-story buildings with a mix of communal and single family apartments arranged around a small square with galleries on the upper floor. This southern-European style residential architecture – suitable for Odessa because of its mild climate – was widespread throughout the city during the first half of the 19th century (Topchiev 1994: 214). Most courtyards are closed spaces entered through a central passageway with gates of iron or wood, although some have passageways to adjacent streets. In the centre of the courtyard there is often a large tree (presumably to provide shade and for aesthetic purposes) while benches can be found under the tree or around the edges of the square. “Conveniences” such as a water source and toilet were often located in the courtyard itself although many buildings now have indoor plumbing. Depending on the courtyard, garages and storage sheds may be found at the back. Laundry is often hung in the courtyard and while it is rare to find domestic animals and gardens as was common in the past, most courtyards have a brood of cats. Some Moldovankan courtyards have a haphazard appearance because of the construction of makeshift, semi-official housing on the sites of bombed or collapsed buildings after World War II. Although each Moldovankan courtyard is undoubtedly a unique place, these common features make the courtyard a specific kind of place and a key feature in the imagination of Odessa as a locality and Moldovanka itself as a place within it.

Courtyards are complex social spaces. In the late Soviet period (and now) courtyard residents were initially strangers from a variety of backgrounds who ended up living in the courtyard for different reasons, under circumstances similar to those characterizing a communal flat (Boldetskaia and Leonhardt 1995: 9). In the Soviet period, the courtyards were effectively incorporated into the state through courtyard committees which had a *predsedatel* (head) and several commissioners, structures which still exist in some courtyards but do not have the same clout

in disciplining their members. The notion of *bolshaia semia* (large family) is often invoked by current and former residents to describe ideals of courtyard life – the sense of moral obligation, solidarity and cooperation (see also Boldetskaia and Leonhardt 1995). Conflicts and tensions have arisen among neighbours over appropriate moral behaviour and more recently, differences in socio-economic status (*ibid*). Individuals who grew up in Moldovankan courtyards repeated common themes: features of communal life; residents’ multi-cultural backgrounds; humorous stories about neighbours; and the emigration of neighbours and in-migration of strangers.⁷

Elena Nezdoinoga, the architect responsible for the Ilichevsk district,⁸ provided a description of the communal nature of courtyard life:

In Moldovanka, the smaller the courtyard, the more exotic and *koloritni*. You also have your Aunt Sonya and Aunt Dusia who are keeping an eye on everyone. I grew up when you could feel it really strongly. I was born in 1955. You could feel this 100% until 1960.⁹ On holidays we celebrated in the courtyards. We set up a table there and had a huge meal together. If someone got married or if there was a birthday we had a meal together and celebrated in the courtyard. In the evenings it was one big courtyard where adults played dominoes or chess and children played around. If my mum went to work, someone would make sure that I got to school. The whole courtyard was keeping a look out ... there were people who on their own initiative organized activities for children and looked after them. It was one big family. There was a lane with twelve courtyards. Children from those twelve courtyards played together. If someone lost their child, they usually found him with a grandmother from the neighbouring courtyard. The *kolorit* that existed then is disappearing. But times change.

Anna Kerpel, a correspondent for the news agency *Ukrinform* in her late thirties, also grew up in Moldovanka. She elaborated further on some of the “traditions” that made Moldovankan courtyards distinct from the centre, some of which she became aware of from friends who visited from the centre or other cities:

Courtyard residents always considered the courtyard part of their home. That’s why it was acceptable for women to go around in a

housecoat and men in pyjamas. They would often stand around talking on the street in front of the building with friends from neighbouring courtyards after garbage collection... Because everyone knew each other, the residents of old courtyards hardly ever had curtains in their windows. Everything would become known anyway...

It was usual to speak to people from wherever you were standing – from a distance – sometimes from a window when you had to call kids, or speak to someone in the courtyard. A woman might bargain with a seller in the courtyard from her window. Or if a kid went to a part of the courtyard where his mum couldn't see she would stick her head out her window and yell: "Where's Alesha?!"

One other difference between Moldovanka and the centre, was the ease with which you could communicate and make contact with people. The flat where we lived had a window that opened onto the street. We would often play our music in that room. We noticed that outside the window there some men were standing around who lived nearby. I thought that maybe it was their gathering place. But one day I had the window open and one asked me to turn up the music. So it was clear that this group formed thanks to. They began to gather outside our window to listen to music and discuss their affairs.

Whereas Elena's temporal reference point is the 1950s and 60s, ten to fifteen years after World War II had ended, after Stalin's death, and a time when the hardships of the immediate post-war period were beginning to recede, Anna describes experiences in the 1980s and early 1990s. Elena and Anna's description of the kinship-like relationships among neighbours and the communal use of courtyard for leisure and festivities captures the "provincial" quality Karakina evokes. Although Utekhin's definition of courtyards in Petersburg underscores their role in the formation of child, youth or criminal subcultures, Elena and Anna's accounts suggest social relationships among and across generations (2001: 186). In contrast to Gerasimova's analysis of communal apartments, in courtyards, it seems there was "purposeful common activity" on the part of residents (2002: 215). The picture these two women paint appears to have more in common with village life than qualities classical urban theorists have attributed to cities, such as

indifference and lack of empathy for other city dwellers (Simmel 1969) which Gerasimova also describes for many communal flat residents (2002: 224), or the impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental quality of relationships (Wirth 1969). The understandings of space generated in and between courtyards through the interplay of built form, social relationships and styles of communication seem more intimately connected to "personal" spaces of the home than the corridors and kitchens of communal flats. Courtyard life in Moldovanka of the late Soviet period, as recalled by contemporary Odessans, appears to have been a distinct form of communalism generated in part by pre-revolutionary architectural forms and traditions in contact with evolving Soviet ideologies and practices.

Viktor Feldman, an archivist, lived in Moldovanka from the time he was born in 1915 until Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Viktor's description of a pre-World War II courtyard life vividly portrays the multi-ethnic composition of families and professions that no longer exist:

I lived on the corner of Bazarnaia Street and Troikhugolnaia Street – the boundary between Moldovanka and the city... The courtyard was very unique. There were two main categories of people. First there were those who worked for the Jewish Funeral Brotherhood which was located in our building, one of the first civic organizations of the Jewish community in Odessa. This Brotherhood collected money and buried the poor – of which there were many – free or nearly free of charge. They collected money from the rich for funerals. The organization was quite harsh. If they considered that a family had not given them enough money, they might not let them enter the cemetery.... The second category was workers. Many worked in the port as stevedores A stevedore never drank vodka with anyone from the Funeral Brotherhood. They said: "they eat their bread from others' grief."

...The composition of the courtyard was very international. Among my friends there were Greeks, Germans – Pavel Gauk – his family were colonists, and Bulgarians. I think there were about 50-70 families in the courtyard. And at least five different nationalities... In courtyards, people for the most part lived on friendly terms. I don't remember serious scandals with the

exception of those times when one of the stevedores came home very drunk.

Whereas Anna and Elena's courtyard descriptions evoke a village-like atmosphere, Viktor's suggests that courtyard life may be a blend of qualities attributed to rural and urban milieux. In particular, the manner in which different nationalities and professions lived as neighbours in close quarters suggests the qualities of density and heterogeneity associated more with cities (Wirth 1969).

Cooperation, kinship-type relations and ethnic tolerance are the positive features highlighted about courtyard life, the features that are part of the local ideology of Odessa itself as *bolshaia semia*. In contrast to this rosy picture, other people noted negative features of communal life and inter-ethnic relations. Maria Maslak (Galina Maksimenko's mother) was born in Moldovanka in 1911. Her Ukrainian parents had moved to Odessa from Chernihiv. With the exception of the years between 1939-42 when she lived with her second husband's family in the central part of the city, she lived in Moldovanka until 1983.

Moldovanka. What? What kind of life? Awful conditions! A toilet in the courtyard. Water in the courtyard. ... I did my laundry there – but you had to watch what you hung out there because there was so much stealing... Later the flat began to fall apart. The courtyard... the walls were falling down...

I finished only four classes at school. But my children studied – my daughter was the best student in her class. The teacher asked her to help other students... I remember one neighbour, Natasha. Her grandmother came over once to make a scandal. She was angry that I threw her kids out and didn't let my daughter help them. I said why should they bother her, she has to study too. She'd be studying and they'd come round and distract her by asking for help.

Maria's account stresses the conflicts with neighbours over attempts to enforce a space for the family and the violation of the obligations implied by the notion of "big family" such as stealing. Ilia Rotenburg, who is Jewish, was born in 1945 and also grew up in Moldovanka. An engineer and photographer, Ilia also underscored the difficulties of communal living:

Imagine. a shared kitchen and toilet, different standards of cleanliness, families living together in close proximity. You are forced to live together in a small space. There is nowhere to hide. There were often scandals but very rarely did they take an ethnic character – only at critical moments, like when it came time to sharing the electricity bill or something, someone would one accuse another of having served the Romanians, or accuse a Jew of not wanting to fight [in the war] and being a coward...

The discomforts Maria and Ilia describe such as having "nowhere to hide" resonate strongly with anxieties about demarcating "private" space in communal flats (Gerasimova 2002). These concerns about "private space" contradict the depictions of communalism presented earlier. Various scholars of Soviet history have remarked on privatization of Soviet life in the beginning in the late thirties and continuing in the post-war period – and thus the creation of a subject for whom "privacy" is an issue. However, it is possible that this process evolved unevenly and that there was a mix of subjects for whom these issues were more or less salient. The courtyards of Moldovanka may have supported a more communal-oriented subject.

World War II and the Romanian Occupation had traumatic effects on this district and changed the composition of the courtyards and relations within them. Jews who remained in the district became the victims of the Nazi extermination policy. Suddenly ethnicity mattered, identities were reified, and Odessans' ethnic tolerance evaporated. Although Vladimir Rechester (b. 1923) described his courtyard as a "big family" with members of different nationalities, his stories provided a chilling account of the brutal ways the war transformed the social fabric of the district. His family and one other Jewish family were evacuated and learned what happened when they returned after the war. Some Jewish neighbours who remained behind were shot, while others perished in the Slobodka ghetto. His Bulgarian childhood friend turned in Jewish residents across the street who were subsequently shot.

Transformation is a theme in nearly every contemporary account of courtyard life. Nearly all the residents of Ilia's courtyard have moved away or emigrated. Mikhail Poisner, lecturer, collector and writer who still lives in the courtyard where he grew up, noted that virtually all of his immediate neighbours had moved there from villages in the

past decade. Vladimir Rechister lamented that there were hardly any “real” Odessans left in Moldovanka and that villagers had taken their place. Ilia was concerned that Moldovanka was becoming like certain districts in European cities populated by large numbers of “foreigners” – people from the Caucasus, China and Vietnam. Individuals whose parents may have moved to Odessa from the village prior to, during, or after the war are now highly critical of newcomers. The “tolerance” that Odessans constantly attribute to themselves is not a mythical, enduring quality, but subject to wider social and political processes that construct certain categories of peoples as insiders and others as outsiders. There are new albeit more subtle processes of exclusion occurring at an ideological level in response to social transformation and its perceived effects on the erosion of Odessa’s special qualities.

Moldovankan courtyards are constituted as places through specific practices and local ideology. Like houses they seem to embody and generate sociality (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). Given that “dwelling” is a key aspect of the phenomenological experience of place, it is perhaps not surprising that the courtyard has taken on such a significant role in Odessans’ self image, given the ubiquitous experiences of dwelling in such quarters until the 1960s. Many Odessans consider the Soviet districts built in the post war period to be “not Odessan” and incapable of generating an Odessan person. Curiously the communal life of the courtyard reflects the benign sociality of the courtyards of the middle period of Soviet architecture Caroline Humphrey analyses in Makine’s imaginative accounts (2005: 53). Yet as architectural structures, Moldovankan courtyards pre-dated Soviet ideologies and architectural practices yet are a form that fit well with and then outlived them. Although the uniqueness of courtyard life is viewed as Odessan (as distinct from Soviet) it is nevertheless inflected with the meanings of Soviet communalism. Finally, the idealized image of the courtyard life in the past may serve as a means of imagining, if not realizing the possibility of transcending new and old divisions, similar to the way nostalgia for past forms of hospitality, mutual dependence and reciprocity in Rethemnos, Crete express a longing to overcome present-day class, educational, and cultural differences (Herzfeld 1991: 66-67).

The Starokonnoi Market

The liveliest theatre can be found at the market.

– Leonid Utesov

Starokonnoi is more than a market – it’s a condition of the soul.

– Vadim Evodokimov, Slovo, 23.03.2001

Like courtyards, the Starokonnoi (Old Horse) Market has become a defining place of Moldovanka and Odessa as a whole. It is located in a very old part of the district between Petropavlovskaja, Raskidailovskaja, Kosvennaia and Konnaia Streets. The market is particularly striking on weekends when flea market vendors lay out their goods on the sidewalks around the small market square. Locally, it is being reified as one of the few “authentic” Odessan places that remain.

A market has operated at the Starokonnoi Marketplace since the 1830s although it has undergone many transformations both in size and the nature of goods sold.¹⁰ In its current manifestation, the Starokonnoi Market has two parts. The first consists of the market square where small warehouses, stalls and kiosks are located and where vendors sell pets and goods found in other markets in the city – food items, clothing, toiletries, and small gadgets. The second part resembles a flea market, a makeshift market along the streets outside the marketplace where people display items on sidewalks for several blocks. It is the flea market with its eclectic range of goods that people have in mind when they refer to the uniqueness of Starokonnoi. Selling on the sidewalks is technically illegal, although tolerated.¹¹ Prior to 1991 when the market was sold to a private owner, many vendors who now stand on the street traded in the marketplace itself. Some moved out of the marketplace because space was taken up by new vendors while others did not want to pay the higher fee. The marketplace has been expanded at the expense of a block of old residential buildings. According to the district architects’ office, street vendors were to be relocated to the new marketplace but as of the July 2005 they continue to sell on the streets.

An eclectic assortment of goods were available on the streets around the Starokonnoi Market. Many people sold second-hand clothing. Others sold used books – mainly Soviet publications and textbooks although occasionally a collector’s item. Some vendors sold antiques, but these items were not considered to be as high

quality as goods found there in the late Soviet period. All types of old Soviet goods – lamps, busts of Lenin and Stalin, dishes, pots, radios, pins, and LPs – were sold. Sections of the street market specialized in Soviet-made car and appliance parts. Other individuals served the vendors by selling coffee, tea and stuffed buns out of stationary or mobile counters.

In a newspaper article about the Starokonnoi Market, a local journalist Vadim Evdokimov commented on what made the place special:

There are few places left in our city about which you can say: “here you can feel the spirit of Odessa, this place smells of Odessa.” This Odessan *kolorit* is given not so much by the external appearance as much as by the atmosphere of conversation (*obshchenie*), or the aura, that predominates. These are the feelings aroused in us by the intoxicating air of the Starokonnoi Market, which for Odessans is simultaneously a zoo, a workshop, an interest club and an open air museum. (Evdokimov 2001)

Evdokimov refers to the “spirit” and “smell” of Odessa and indicates that the uniqueness of the place – and Odessa as a whole – is something that one does not necessarily see. Rather one feels – or becomes intoxicated by – the atmosphere. Although the exchange of an eclectic range of commodities plays a role in giving Moldovanka its special qualities, a much more important facet of place is the exchange of stories, ideas, jokes, and performances either independent from or alongside the transaction of commodities. This account – one of several I encountered during my stay – reveals the increasing objectification of the market as a place to find the “real” Odessa.

I experienced “my” Starokonnoi when I joined Albert Malinovskii in selling his goods on Saturdays during the fall of 2002. Albert is a retired engineer born and raised in Odessa whose vocation is writing short stories and local history. He recently published a book about film in Odessa and was writing a book of short stories set in Odessa. He had been attending the market for several years. During the fall of 2002 he stood in front of a building on Serovaia Street.¹² The items he sold differed from week to week. Compact discs, videos, and his own book were the mainstay of his goods for sale. Sometimes he sold old postcards, journals, books or other pictures of interest to collectors. Other times he sold clothes, barrettes, hairpins, and Soviet-made perfume.

Some goods were his own possessions while other items were acquired through exchanging items with friends. The collectors’ items he sold had sometimes been purchased while occasionally he sold items on friends’ behalf.

Albert stressed that he did not attend the market to sell goods because he needed the money. Rather, attending the market was a way to see friends regularly, meet new people, and arrange deals. In other words he sought *obshchenie* and trade in other intangibles – relationships, stories, ideas – in the way Evdokimov suggests. He took time to walk around the market to visit fellow vendors and purchase goods. Often these people could help in resolving a problem he faced unconnected to the market. Albert also had regular clients who would stop and chat, some of whom were interested in the collectors’ items and others in his ever-changing selection of CDs and videos.

Scenes observed or conversations overheard become material for Albert’s stories while relationships formed with vendors and clients yielded information for his own historical work or story-writing. For example, Ivan Zhrebkin, born in 1920, lived on Petropavlovskaiia Street where he sold used radios and cassette players. He had worked in the Odessa film studio and had provided Albert with information about certain directors and old movie theatres in Odessa. Aleksander, another elderly Moldovanka resident, whose family had been in Odessa for generations, had told Albert stories from his own life and what he had learned about the history of the city from elderly relatives. Albert’s relationship with Ivan and Aleksander illustrates the non-commercial kinds of exchanges that occur at the market. In other words, Ivan and Aleksander relayed memories and historical knowledge that became part of Albert’s local history and fictional accounts of the city.

Not all vendors attended the market for conversation. For many, the sale of goods provided a source of income, however minuscule. Albert’s friend Sergei, an engineer, sold goods at the market for four years when he could not find other work even though he found it degrading. He had stopped selling at the market after working for a deputy during the parliamentary elections in the spring of 2002 after which he was offered work promoting films for the Odessa Film Club. Daria, one of Albert’s neighbours at the market and a teacher by training, insisted the majority of vendors had a higher education but simply could not afford to continue working in their profession

because of low salaries. Daria was from Mykolaiv where she worked in an antique shop. She came regularly to the Starokonnoi Market to sell antiques on the weekend. Svetlana, the resident of the house in front of which these vendors stood, was from Samara but moved to Odessa thirty years earlier. In Odessa she had worked in the Musical Comedy Theatre for some time but from 1986 onwards she had gone on tours to eastern European countries as well as Italy, Spain and Turkey to purchase goods which she sold on her return. Her husband was a poacher involved in the caviar trade who had lived in Uzbekistan for the previous eight years to work off a debt he incurred to pay for a shipment that did not arrive in Odessa. She sold goods such as clothes, Lenin portraits, books and appliances but still had difficulty making ends meet as she was supporting her sister who was mentally ill and unable to work.

One Saturday, one of Albert's more distant acquaintances – a "typical" flamboyant Odessan – stopped for a chat. He showed Albert a black mug with his zodiac sign which he purchased together with a coin, allegedly from 17th century Russia. Then he asked who I was and said: "I can tell she's not an Odessan." He began flattering me. Pulling out a picture of his son, he replied, "I'd introduce you to my son, but he's married already, he's attractive, tall, and smart too..." Then he reeled out a series of stories from his own life. He began with the fact that he was a pilot and then jumped to a story about his high school graduation night: "I didn't know how to dance well, but I tried to practice a little. At the dance I met this girl Olga who was very small. I danced with her all night and never noticed that I was carrying her and that her feet were not touching the ground! I wanted to marry her but my mother was against it." Then he told a story about how he tried to learn to kiss properly: "I used to sell cups of water at the Pryvoz Market for five kopecks. With the money I bought a tomato... I bit it and sucked till there was nothing left. Then once at a movie, I was so anxious to try it out that I grabbed the woman next to me kissed her, felt her up, and then she passed out from shock..." After telling these exuberant stories, he made a move to go – kissed my hand and wished me health and happiness and then was off. After this Albert said: "You see, typical Odessan. You'd never experience something like that in Canada would you?"

This vignette evokes Utesov's comment that the "liveliest theatre can be found at the bazaar" and Dontsova's reference to the

commonly held idea that Moldovanka is an "open-air theatre." Their comments also resonate with Agnew's (1988) analysis of the inter-relations of the ideas of theatre and market in Anglo-American thought. However, in contrast to Agnew's description of the interconnections between the *institutions* of theatre and market in Medieval England, in the Starokonnoi Market relations seem founded on the idea that both vendors and buyers perform the Odessan character in everyday exchanges of stories and commodities for the enjoyment of other Odessans and non-Odessans alike. As place the Starokonnoi Market differs from courtyards. Its fluctuating, fleeting relationships contrast to the kin-like relationships of courtyards. Yet the idealized images of courtyards and the Starokonnoi Market share an emphasis on connection, communication, and community and perhaps as a means to imagine transcending newly-created social, economic and ethnic differences.

Touring Moldovanka and the Performativity of Place

Portraits of courtyard life and encounters at the Starokonnoi Market convey a sense of two kinds of place in Moldovanka whose salience resonates widely and identifies the district as one locus of the "real Odessa." Yet a sense of place is also generated through the interaction of body, place and motion (Casey 1996) in spatial practices such as touring. Anna Misiuk offers walking tours about "Jewish Odessa" to groups of German tourists who travel to Ukraine on "intellectual" tours organized by the Berlin Tourist Bureau as well as groups from Israel and North America. One part of the tour focuses on the centre of the city and another on Moldovanka. I joined an informal tour she offered two German tourists and some of her course participants from the Jewish Self-Education Centre. We began at the Old Free Port boundary where she provided an overview of the district. She highlighted the large numbers of Jews who moved to the area because of the lax practice of registration and the lucrative trade in contraband goods. She stressed the fact that the district was half-urban and half-rural and at one point had played a significant role in providing the city with food.

We walked to Prokhorovskaia Square and stopped at the Holocaust Memorial commemorating the Road to Death¹³ and Odessans who hid and helped Jews. Turning onto Miasoiedovskaia Street, Anna pointed out an administrative building that had once been a

prayer house. We also entered a small “typical” courtyard where Anna described the relationships among neighbours and the convoluted interiors of the buildings. At the corner of Miasoiedovskaia Street and Khmelnitskaia Street she pointed out the Jewish Hospital (now called the “First City Hospital”). When we turned onto Bulgarskaia Street, with Dontsova’s book in hand Anna located an old courtyard where a veterinarian operated. She noted the stalls for animals now transformed into storage areas. On the other side of the street, she pointed out a building where one of the wedding banquets in Babel’s stories had taken place, and shops that sold water and “eastern sweets.” We walked back to the centre through Ilich Park where the first major cemetery in Odessa had been located. It had Christian, Jewish and Muslim sections but was leveled by the Soviet authorities in the 1930s. Anna’s tour connected visible monuments such as the Holocaust memorial with newly re-discovered but as yet unmarked places such as the prayer house. Although she highlighted ordinary places such as the courtyard, the places that guided her narrative were “significant” because of their connection to Babel’s stories or Jewish history and culture in the city. This is much like Rojek’s concept of indexing, the use of fiction and fact to imbue physical space with meaning (1997: 53). Places that have disparate temporal, social or spatial relationships are linked together in traversing Moldovanka to create a very different sense of a place.

In 2002 Anna was training a group of university students to give guided tours of Jewish Odessa. During one meeting she narrated an incident that had occurred during one tour with a German group through Moldovanka to illustrate that the theatricality and exuberance of the district residents remained. On this occasion Anna’s group of German tourists entered a small courtyard on Kosvenaia Street near the Starokonnoi Market to see the courtyard where the wedding banquet described in Babel’s story *The King* took place. As the German guide read the story out loud, some residents emerged from their flats onto the gallery in housecoats and slippers and looked down at the group. One woman said about Anna: “I’ve seen her here before, I’ve wondered what she’s been up to.” The residents figured out what the guide was reading and began talking among themselves. The German asked Anna to translate. One woman continued, “Yes, I remember my great-aunt talking about that banquet” and proceeded to add a few

details Babel had missed. According to Anna, the Germans were wide-eyed with wonder.

Anna’s story about the unplanned encounter between tourists and residents in the courtyard captures issues concerning the complex inter-relations of locals, guides, texts, performances and tourists in the production of place (Coleman and Crang 2002). The place seems to perform through its exuberant and eccentric residents. Yet as these “performances” are spontaneous and unplanned, the line between drama and life is blurred. Both the guide, a local non-resident of the district, and the tourists from abroad experience the courtyard event as blurring the boundary of fact and fiction and reproducing Babel’s mythical image of the district. Coleman and Crang propose an approach to tourism that fixes neither authenticity, performance nor place but rather sees it as an “event that is about mobilizing and reconfiguring spaces and places, bringing them into new constellations and therefore transforming them” and advocate paying attention to the performativity of place rather than performance in place (2002:10). As we saw in the section on the Starokonnoi Market, Moldovanka is a place Odessans themselves consider “performative” – “an open air theatre.” The places where these performances are witnessed are increasingly being objectified as “authentic” even locally. As global tourism develops, the performativity of place will likely transform. It would not be surprising to see the emergence of performative engagements with place similar to Filippucci’s (2002) descriptions of carnival and a folklore group’s performance of traditional street trades in Bassano, Italy.

Conclusion

This article has traced processes through which Moldovanka comes to stand for all Odessa in order to illuminate how the city is culturally produced as a locality “separate” from Ukraine. Moldovanka’s place in Odessa has shifted from marginal to central along three axes – geographic, socio-economic and symbolic – and in relation to its manifestation as high or low culture. Moldovanka’s symbolically central position is connected with Babel’s high literary representation of the district in his *Odessa Stories*. These portrayals of colorful and exotic characters continue to transmit a sense of Odessa as Jewish and part of a Russian cultural space. Certain kinds of places within the district – courtyards and a marketplace – are viewed as embodying *kolorit* and forms of sociality considered authentically

Odessan. Spatial practices such as touring also play a role in regenerating a sense of the district as a spatially and socially distinct place. Tours reproduce a more objectified, mythologized Moldovanka – mainly for outsiders – and generate a sense of the place as “performative” of Odessan *kolorit*.

Although on the one hand, this article has traced the production of images that fix the “essence” of Moldovanka, on the other it situated the often contradictory understandings of place against the backdrop of larger-scale economic, political and cultural processes. Although Moldovanka at times stands for all Odessa, it has nevertheless been produced as a place in opposition to other parts of the city – particularly the centre – through economic processes that left it on the margins in prerevolutionary times and to different degrees in subsequent periods. In a different vein, Babel’s images of Moldovanka and Odessa have acquired their salience through literary processes and reading practices that are simultaneously translocal – created through the Soviet literary establishment, Russian speaking audiences, and now western tourists – and local.

The qualities highlighted about Moldovanka comprise a combination of features associated with villages (kinship, solidarity) and the city (ethnic tolerance and social diversity). The positive valuation of “provincial” ways of communal courtyard life may be a response to a sense of dislocation and destabilized social networks caused by emigration, economic and social change. These images contrast with another set of images about the city as a bastion of culture and cosmopolitanism in contrast to the backward countryside. The mix of rural and urban qualities works to underscore Odessa’s distinctiveness and the differences between Odessans and residents of other Ukrainian cities who are considered cold and distant (Kyiv as capital city) or intolerant (Lviv, western Ukrainian “nationalist” city).

The coexistence of the vivid image of Moldovanka as the location of *kolorit* and images of the darker, more dreary side of life in the district is suggestive of broader socio-economic and discursive instabilities in the post-Soviet period. The images of Moldovanka codified as “authentically Odessan” in tourist guides, journalistic accounts, and the qualities of places such as courtyards and the Starokonnoi Market that residents highlight have in common an emphasis on community, solidarity, and sociability. The objectification of the places

embodying these qualities is occurring as the practices and forms of sociality they embody are displaced.

Notes

¹ Odessa’s historical centre has remained largely intact from the prerevolutionary era. Although some construction took place in the interwar period, it was primarily after World War II that the city significantly expanded when large residential districts were built where about 70 per cent of the population live (Topchiev 1994).

² Odessa was founded in 1794 by Catherine II to stabilize, settle, and develop trade in the lands north of the Black Sea that the Russian Empire had acquired from the Ottoman Empire (Herlihy 1986). The city was established a few decades after the remaining vestiges of autonomous Ukrainian political formations east of the Dnipro River had been dismantled; indeed, Ukraine did not attain full political sovereignty until 1991, with the exception of brief periods in 1918-1919. Throughout the nineteenth century, Odessa was one of the most rapidly developing cities in Europe, and by the mid-1800s was the third-most prominent city in the Russian Empire in size, economy, and cultural importance. Inhabited by Greeks, Italians, French, Poles, Jews, Bulgarians, Germans, Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians, among others, the city was cosmopolitan from the outset. It emerged from Catherine’s policy of attracting foreign merchants, administrators, and colonists from western Europe and the Ottoman Empire to develop Novorossia (New Russia). By the early twentieth century the city was linguistically and culturally more Russian than a century previously. A large Jewish community made up at least a third of its population. With the outbreak of World War I, the city was hard hit by the dislocation of industry and the decline of the Black Sea trade. By 1923, it had lost nearly half its population due to external and internal migration (Guthrie 1981:175).

After its incorporation into Soviet Ukraine, Odessa was eclipsed economically, politically, and culturally by other cities, even though it remained an important port in the Soviet Union and home to a shipping fleet. During the Second World War, Odessa was occupied by the Romanians from October 1941 until April 1944. Although the Romanian administration was less brutal than the German administration in other Ukrainian territories, it was nonetheless responsible for the

murder of approximately 200,000 Jews in Transnistria (Dallin 1998; Ofer 1993). Today, Odessa has about one million residents, of which approximately 60 per cent are ethnic Ukrainians, 30 per cent are Russians, and the rest comprise Bulgarians, Jews, Roma, Poles, Greeks, Vietnamese, Chinese, Koreans, and others.

³ For an anthropological discussion of these processes in Ukraine see Wanner (1998).

⁴ This "Odessa-text" (Stanton 2003: 117) can be traced to early portrayals of the city as a special place, dominated by trade that seemingly sprang up from nowhere in the wild steppe, populated by people from different countries (Gubar and Herlihy 2005: 5). In the 1920s this "Odessa-text" received further elaboration by a group of Odessan writers labeled the "southwest" or "Odessan" school of writers by Viktor Shklovsky of which Babel was part (Karakina 2004; Stanton 2003).

⁵ <http://www.migdal.ru> accessed 17 April 2004.

⁶ <http://www.moldovanka.od.ua/1/4.htm> accessed 5 August 2004.

⁷ There are a number of literary portrayals of courtyard life one of the most thorough of which is Arkadii Lvov's novel *Courtyard*. Lvov's novel is a fictionalized account of one courtyard during the late thirties and in the immediate post-war period. The majority of the conversations and interactions described take place in the courtyard rather than the interior living spaces. See also Aleksandrov (2002) and Poisner (2001) for more contemporary portrayals.

⁸ Iliachevsk was one of two districts in which Moldovanka was located when I conducted fieldwork. At the end of my stay a decision was made to amalgamate Odessa's eight administrative districts into four, as a result of which Moldovanka was to become a single district.

⁹ It is possible changes occurred as a result of the construction of new residential districts to the north and south of Odessa where many Odessans living in cramped quarters in the centre subsequently moved. It was apparently not uncommon to see courtyard celebrations 10 years ago but now they are increasingly rare events.

¹⁰ The Starokonnoi Market was founded in the 1830s as a livestock market so that cattle could be traded more conveniently than at the New Bazaar. It was originally known as the livestock market but later was called the horse market. In 1850, it

became the "old horse market" when a new livestock market was set up. Shortly thereafter, in 1855 the city Duma decided to build a produce market at that location. Although initially difficulties were encountered in attracting vendors, eventually the market developed to sell a standard range of goods. Around 1925 when the Old Bazaar on Aleksandrovskii Prospekt and Bazarnaia Street was burnt down, the market selling exotic animals relocated to Starokonnoi for which it is still well-known today. It is known to have operated throughout the war as a place where second hand goods and unusual books were sold, a reputation that continues today (Dontsova 2001; Evdokimov 2001).

¹¹ Although the militia occasionally harassed vendors, usually they were left alone.

¹² The vendors usually make an agreement with the owner of the house they stand in front of – they seek their permission and pay a small fee each time. Albert paid one hryvnia (the unit of Ukrainian currency) in 2002 (equivalent to 15 US cents).

¹³ This is the name given to signify the routes Jews followed as the Romanian police forced them out of the city to death and labor camps.

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